

When Cedric Jennings was born, the odds were stacked against him. His father was often in jail, and his mother's income barely kept the family fed and housed. They lived in too many places to recall—from short-term rentals, to pull-out couches in relatives' homes, to unheated apartments. Cedric walked home alone from school each day past drug dealers through southeast Washington, D.C., at the height of the city's crack epidemic.

For many children, such circumstances portend unhappy outcomes. Somehow, though, Cedric beat the odds, graduated from high school, and gained acceptance to Brown University, where he graduated with honors on his way to earning graduate degrees from Harvard and the University of Michigan (Oppenheim, 2008). As Ron Suskind (1998) recounts in *A Hope in the Unseen*, a key factor in Cedric's success was his mother, who maintained high expectations for her son. Another equally important factor seemed to emerge from deep within Cedric himself—a quality that helped him shun drugs and violence, disregard classmates mocking his bookishness, and study deep into the night. Researchers have found this quality to be as crucial as cognitive ability to student success.